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write history. right future.

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The chance to rewrite a city constitution doesn't come along every day. In Los Angeles, in fact, it happens once in a lifetime.

Your chance to speak up is now. The Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission is working to update L.A.'s 73-year-old Charter and wants your input. How would you make city government better? With this booklet, you can help make history while shaping L.A.'s future.

Your kids will thank you.

LA City Charter
LEANER. SMARTER. BETTER.

what would you do?

If you could remake city government in Los Angeles, what would you do? Would you make the Mayor or the City Council responsible for delivery of city services? Would you give more say to individual neighborhoods? Would you have more City Council members? Would you change the way some city employees are hired (or fired)? What changes would you make so that Los Angeles had better parks, libraries, trash removal, and police and fire departments?

With the workbook you're now holding, you can have a say in these decisions and others. The City Charter, which determines how the city government is structured, is undergoing an historic review that may affect every aspect of how the city works. This is your opportunity to have a say in what your city and your future will be like, and to help make the Charter leaner, smarter, and better. **Please complete the attached feedback form, found in the middle of this workbook, and mail it back by Friday, October 30, 1998.**

tell us in 10

Ten minutes. That's how long it will take you to let us know what you want for the future of Los Angeles city government.

Here's what to do:

1. Remove the "feedback" section of the workbook.
2. Read each recommendation and let us know what you think of it in the appropriate response box.
3. If you need more information before responding, flip to the page with a more detailed description of that recommendation.
4. When you're all finished, return the feedback section to us, either in person at a Charter open house near you, or by folding it over and mailing it to us.

* If you've got a few extra minutes and want more information, check out the rest of the workbook for a more detailed look at Charter reform and the reform process, or visit our website: www.charterreform.org. We also have more detailed information at your local L.A. public library.

Your opinion is important to us.

We want to know what you think so we can help make a city government that better serves your needs. Make a difference: Tell Us in 10.

what is the charter?

The Charter is the constitution of the City of Los Angeles. In this document, the people say how the city government is to be run and what powers their elected representatives will have.

City officials can't enact a law or do anything that conflicts with the Charter. Every word in the Charter was put there by a vote of the people. Charter provisions can't be added or removed without a vote of the people.

The Charter sets up the city's governing structure. Under the present Charter, the city is governed by Council members elected from 15 districts and a Mayor who is elected citywide. The Charter also provides for the citywide election of a City Attorney - the city's legal advisor - and a City Controller who watches the city's finances.

In addition to elective offices, the Charter establishes a number of city departments that provide vital services to residents, such as police and fire protection. In some cases, the Charter even provides strict guidelines for how these departments function.

The Charter and schools

Charter reform is important for schools, too. That's because the Charter determines how members are elected or appointed to the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education, how long they may serve, and how much they are paid each year.

why should I care?

The Charter influences the lives of everyone who lives here by setting up how the city government works. It is the vehicle through which the people of Los Angeles limit and control the powers and responsibilities of their city government. City government, in turn, enacts and administers laws that influence the quality of our lives in the city. These laws touch upon a vast array of activities, including: public safety & criminal prosecution, the safe treatment of animals, the creation and maintenance of parks & libraries, the distribution of water and power, the maintenance of streets and sewers, the pickup of residential rubbish, the planning, zoning and development of land, the promotion of economic growth and the protection of our environment. Generally, the Charter determines how the city performs these duties, which in the end, affects us all!

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why change the charter?

Just how much have we grown over the years?

In 1920, the population of LA was 577,000. In 1998, it's 3.7 million!

Charter:

A "constitution" that sets up a city's governing structure.

The Charter that governs the City of Los Angeles took effect in 1925. For its time, the Charter was a remarkable piece of work. But because hundreds of single, voter-approved changes were made over the next 73 years, the Charter lost much of its original coherence. Now in 1998, the citizens of Los Angeles have a Charter that some believe hamstrings responsible government and demands reform. As one change after another has been grafted onto the original document, the Charter has swelled to over 700 pages. And as the Charter has grown, representation in local government has shrunk. There is one City Council member for about every 230,000 residents. No other city in America has city council members representing that many people. Some claim that this makes it difficult for people to have access to their own government.

In addition, some observe that the powers of the Mayor, who represents the city as a whole, often conflict with those of the City Council members, who represent separate districts, and with various commission heads, blurring the lines of power and responsibility. Individual neighborhoods with differing needs complain of being left out of the process of deciding their future. Secession movements are brewing in the San Fernando Valley, the Westside, and in the San Pedro-Wilmington areas.

The goal of the Charter Reform Commission is to craft a Charter that establishes clear lines of accountability in government while maintaining the flexibility necessary to carry Los Angeles into the future, and to do so with input from all the communities of Los Angeles.

what's the charter reform commission?

The Charter Reform Commission is made up of 21 people from many different walks of life. It includes educators, small-business people, homeowners' representatives, a judge, a newspaper CEO, community volunteers, lawyers, a student, business executives, former elected officials and others. Our commissioners are volunteers who were picked because of their passionate commitment to L.A. and to a better Charter for us all.

Since their selection by the City Council, City Attorney, and City Controller in 1996, the commissioners have worked to forge a leaner, smarter, and better L.A. City Charter. They've held more than 70 public hearings, workshops and meetings and have sought valuable input from a wide variety of people, including residents, scholars, business leaders, labor representatives, city officials both past and present, community volunteers, and practitioners from other cities. The commissioners have developed preliminary recommendations for Charter changes, and are now asking the public to comment on those ideas.

Once the commissioners have gathered feedback from the public on the proposals included in this workbook, they'll present revised and final recommendations to the City Council for review. Afterward, a proposed new Charter will be submitted to the voters for approval. Remember: nothing in the Charter can be changed without the approval of voters.

The Commission

George David Kieffer
Chair
Maryann Reyes
1st Vice Chair
Alexandra S. Glickman
2nd Vice Chair

Marguerite Archie-Hudson
LuAnn Boylan
Anton Calleia
Jose De Sosa
Edmund Edelman
Andrew Friedman
Jerry L. Gaines
Linda Griego
Andrew R. Henderson
Stewart Kwoh
Joseph D. Mandel
Gloria Michel
Charley Mims
Doris Isolini Nelson
Judge James N. Reese
Sharon Schuster
Robert M. Wilkinson
Charles Z. Wilson, Jr.

Dr. Raphael Sonenshein
Executive Director

what should I do?

Tell us in 10 minutes what you think. Remove the "feedback" section of this workbook, read each recommendation and let us know what you think of it in the appropriate response box. Then return the feedback section to us, either in person at a Charter open house in your neighborhood, or by folding it in thirds and mailing it to us by October 30, 1998.

You can also visit our website: www.charterreform.org or call us toll free at 1-877-LAspeak (1-877-527-7325).

Your opinion is important to us. We want to know what you want so we can help make a city government that better serves your needs. Make a difference.

before you begin... a brief background

The recommendations outlined on the following pages were reached by the Commission after nearly two years of research, public testimony and thoughtful debate. Together, they address three principal objectives, which are to provide Los Angeles with a City Charter that:

- encourages public participation in municipal government
- clarifies the roles of key city officials so the public can hold them accountable
- is simpler and gives city government more flexibility to operate efficiently

leaner
smarter
better

Many of these recommendations propose changes, but they also include affirmations of the current Charter – a reflection of the Commission's mission to "undertake a comprehensive review of the Los Angeles City Charter, to evaluate what works well and what does not."

Finally, the recommendations presented here are interdependent – they work together. No single recommendation is intended as a "magic bullet" that will by itself create a more accessible, efficient and responsive city government.

We invite you to review our package of recommendations, and we welcome any recommendation you might have for developing a Charter for the 21st Century. If you'd like to review a more comprehensive description of the recommendations, please contact us toll free at 1-877-LAspeak (1-877-527-7325).

what's an ordinance?

As you read through the recommendations, you will notice a recurring word: *ordinance.*

There are two kinds of municipal law in Los Angeles – Charter provisions and ordinances. The difference between the two is this: Charter provisions can only be changed, added or eliminated by a direct vote of the people, while ordinances can be created, altered or taken away by action of the City Council and the Mayor. Most city laws are enacted by ordinance, in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Remember: Nothing in the Charter can be changed without a vote of the people.

Charter provisions:

can only be changed, added or eliminated by a direct vote of the people

Ordinances:

can be created, altered or taken away by action of the City Council and the Mayor

objective one: encourage participation

"I don't get heard!" It is the one phrase that commissioners have heard more than any other over the past two years. Many residents feel frustrated about their ability to effectively influence city government. They say they are left out of the process. The following recommendations are aimed at making it easier for people to take part in government, and to be heard.

1-1. Department of Neighborhoods

Requires a new Department of Neighborhoods to develop L.A.'s first-ever plan for advisory, citywide neighborhood councils.

Advisory neighborhood councils are a familiar concept to many U.S. cities – but they've never been formally implemented in Los Angeles. While some City Council members have voluntarily formed their own community advisory boards, they've never been mandated to do so by the Charter. This recommendation would require a new Department of Neighborhoods to develop a plan for L.A.'s first system of advisory neighborhood councils.

What would advisory neighborhood councils do for you? We believe that advisory neighborhood councils would provide you with an opportunity to be heard at an early stage on issues affecting your neighborhood. And you wouldn't necessarily have to travel downtown to make your voice heard.

Some people favor the creation of neighborhood councils with final decision-making powers over local issues. This commission recommends advisory councils as a "starting point" for Los Angeles.

tell us what you think

Read through each recommendation summary and provide your feedback by checking the column on the right that best describes your opinion. Use the extra space for any additional comments you have.

1-1. Department of Neighborhoods

Require a new Department of Neighborhoods to develop L.A.'s first plan for forming advisory neighborhood councils citywide. **This recommendation would:**

- Create a new department in the Charter.
- Require the Department to seek public input and develop a plan for a citywide system of advisory neighborhood councils.
- Mandate that the plan be developed within a specified time period.
- Require Council to adopt or modify the plan within a certain time period or the Department's proposal goes into effect.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

1-2. Neighborhood Councils

Set minimum standards for the plan to create advisory neighborhood councils. **This recommendation would:**

- Mandate that boundaries be drawn based on neighborhoods, not City Council districts.
- Ensure that all parts of the city have the opportunity to form neighborhood councils.
- Provide opportunities for broad participation on neighborhood councils.
- Allow flexibility in determining how neighborhood councils will be selected.
- Require neighborhood councils to adopt fair and open procedures.
- Require the plan to identify types of decisions subject to neighborhood council review.
- Allow a reasonable opportunity for neighborhood councils to provide input on specific issues affecting their neighborhood.
- Five years after the adoption of a plan, require the appointment of a citizen commission to review the effectiveness of neighborhood councils and recommend Charter changes.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

1-3. City Council Size

Set City Council size at 21 members. **This recommendation would:**

- Increase City Council size from its current 15 members.
- Reduce the number of persons represented by each Council member from 230,000 to 165,000.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

1-4. Council Redistricting

Establish a commission to advise the City Council on how to redraw its districts, keeping neighborhoods together whenever possible. **This recommendation would:**

- Create a new advisory commission appointed by various city officeholders to receive public input and recommend Council district boundaries.
- Set new Charter criteria for respecting neighborhoods.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

1-5. Vote by Mail

Permit all-mail voting in special elections.
This recommendation would:

- Change current Charter provisions to allow some elections to be conducted entirely by mail.
- Allow the Council and Mayor to decide whether to use mail balloting in certain special elections.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

1-6. Board of Education

Set Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education size at nine members, increase the compensation for board members, and instruct City Council to solicit public input when redrawing board district lines. **This recommendation would:**

- Increase the number of Board of Education members from 7 to 9 members.
- Reduce the number of persons represented by each Board member.
- Increase Board member compensation above current $24,000 per year.
- Create a new advisory commission to receive public input and recommend a redistricting plan for Board lines to the City Council. This commission would include representatives living within LAUSD boundaries but outside L.A. city limits.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-1. Removal of General Managers

Give the Mayor greater responsibility for managing the City's workforce and the delivery of services. **This recommendation would:**

- Remove the current Charter requirement that Council approve the Mayor's removal of general managers.
- Give the Mayor sole responsibility to conduct merit pay reviews for general managers, within salary ranges established by Council.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-2. Exempt Positions

Streamline the process for filling city positions that are exempted from Civil Service. **This recommendation would:**

- Require the City Council to approve only the criteria for filling high-level positions exempted from Civil Service requirements and protections, and not the personnel.
- Allow general managers to hire the employee.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-3. Department Management

Clarify department management by putting certain city departments under appointed citizen commissions while leaving general managers in charge of other departments. **This recommendation would:**

- Change management authority for some Charter departments.
- Retain managing authority of citizen commissions for the following departments: Airports, Harbor, Water and Power, Ethics, Fire, Library, Pensions and Retirement, Police, Public Works, and Recreation and Parks.
- Give general managers managing authority over the Personnel and Planning departments.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

001178

2-4. Council Veto

Give Council the ability to veto the decisions of most appointed citizen commissions. **This recommendation would:**

- Change current Charter provisions that allow the Council to approve, reject, or modify decisions made by a citizen commission.
- Allow the Council to reject a commission action, but not change it.
- Retain Council oversight of appointed commissions.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-5. Government Reorganization

Give the Mayor and the Council shared power to reorganize city departments and city offices. **This recommendation would:**

- Modify current Charter provisions that permit the Mayor and Council to reorganize city departments only.
- Give the Mayor and Council the power to reorganize city offices such as the City Clerk and the Treasurer.
- Retain the process of reorganization by ordinance, requiring either a 2/3rds vote of the Council and approval by the Mayor or a 3/4ths vote of the Council without the Mayor's approval.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-6. Controller and Finance

Reorganize the financial operations of the city by consolidating functions into a new Department of Finance.
This recommendation would:

- Create a Department of Finance to include the financial duties currently performed by the City Clerk and the Treasurer.
- Provide that the Controller oversee the payment process of city departments and remain an elected office.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-7. City Attorney

The City Attorney should continue to be elected by the people and should be both legal advisor and criminal prosecutor.
This recommendation would:

- Retain the current Charter framework for this office.
- Retain a unified City Attorney's office, housing both civil and criminal functions.
- Maintain the City Attorney as an office elected by the people.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-8. City Pensions and Retirement

Give city pensions retirement boards greater management authority and allow representation for retired members. **This recommendation would:**

- Provide retired members with representation on the boards that affect them.
- Give the pensions and retirement boards the ability to appoint, remove, and conduct annual reviews of the general managers, with Council approval.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

almost done,
just a few more...

2-9. Planning

Modify the planning and permit process and combine the functions of the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals into one Planning Commission. **This recommendation would:**

- Change current Charter provisions that provide for a separate Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals, and for a multi-tiered planning appeal process.
- Provide that one commission carry out both planning and permit appeal functions, allowing additional boards to be created by ordinance.
- Increase the size of the Planning Commission from 5 to 9 members.
- Limit review of planning permits to one level of appeal.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

2-10. City Council Organization

Give the City Council more flexibility to conduct its meetings outside of City Hall and to organize its work. **This recommendation would:**

- Give the Council more opportunity to conduct business out in the communities.
- Change current Charter requirements that City Council organize itself into 15 committees each chaired by a different member.
- Provide safeguards that prevent Council members from being excluded from committee participation.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

3-1. A Leaner Charter

Make the Charter leaner, more flexible and easier to read. **This recommendation would:**

- Eliminate current Charter provisions that are obsolete or preempted.
- Streamline the language on city powers into a general statement.
- Reduce the number of departments listed in the Charter, and the detail about those departments that remain in the Charter.
- Reorganize sections on Civil Service and pensions and retirement into a separate volume of the Charter.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	no opinion

comments:

Thank you for sharing your views! Please detach this feedback section from the workbook, and fold it down to 1/3 size. Tape it shut, place a stamp on it and drop it in a mailbox. Please mail by **Friday, October 30, 1998**. Thanks again for your participation.

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LA City Charter
LEANER. SMARTER. BETTER.
111 North Hope Street
Room L-33
PO Box 51111
Los Angeles, CA 90051

1-2. Neighborhood Councils

Sets standards for a Neighborhood Council Plan and requires a commission to review neighborhood councils after five years to see if they work.

How should neighborhood councils be introduced in Los Angeles, a city marked by geographic and cultural diversity? And what powers should neighborhood councils have? Focus group studies and public hearings conducted by the Commission showed us that residents' viewpoints vary from community to community. Some people like the idea of giving neighborhood councils Charter authority over a wide range of local issues, such as land use and budget matters. Others say this approach could create too much bureaucracy. Some areas of the city favor elected neighborhood councils, while others feel that self-selected or appointed neighborhood councils would be better suited for their communities. And there are some residents who don't care for the concept of neighborhood councils at all.

To allow maximum flexibility for each neighborhood, we recommend that only the essentials be placed in the Charter. We believe that details on how a formal system of advisory neighborhood councils should be designed are best left to ordinance, where they can be changed over time and permitted to evolve.

However, commissioners believe there should be some common ground in how neighborhood councils are designed. We recommend some Charter guidelines for creating and operating a system of neighborhood councils. These guidelines would require that:

- all parts of the city have an opportunity to form advisory neighborhood councils
- opportunities for broad representation on neighborhood councils are provided
- neighborhood council districts are based upon actual neighborhoods and not City Council districts
- neighborhood councils are given an opportunity to say what they think on issues that affect their neighborhood.

The Neighborhood Council Plan would specify the types of decisions that would go before neighborhood councils for review. The Charter wouldn't spell out whether neighborhood councils are elected, appointed, or self-selected. Instead, it would leave that decision to the people and their elected representatives.

Many points of view have been expressed on how neighborhood councils should be structured and what authority they should have. Therefore, the Commission's recommendation would also require a Charter commission to evaluate the success of neighborhood councils after five years, to determine what is working and what is not.

objective one: encourage participation

1-3. City Council Size

Sets City Council size at 21 members.

We recommend increasing the size of the Council from its current 15 members to 21. Each Los Angeles council member currently represents 230,000 residents – more than any other city council member in the nation. Increasing the number of Council members, we believe, would provide greater representation for everyone, especially for smaller communities that are sometimes left out. Even by adding just six seats to the Council, we'd reduce the representation ratio of residents to Council member by 30%.

Why 21? Some say the current 15 is fine; other want to go to 25 or 35. We felt that a much larger increase was too risky and might produce undesirable changes in the ability of our non-partisan Council to deliberate. In our view, too many Council members could diminish the effectiveness of any one member to represent his or her district with a powerful voice at City Hall.

1-4. Council Redistricting

Establishes a commission to advise City Council on how to redraw its districts, keeping neighborhoods together whenever possible.

Currently, the Charter lets the City Council draw up its own redistricting plan – without meaningful public input and regardless of whether or not it keeps traditional neighborhoods together. This process has led to the formation of many oddly shaped Council districts and to what many people call "political gerrymandering."

Our recommendation would create a new advisory commission, appointed by various city officeholders, to design a redistricting plan with public input. This approach would require the redistricting plan to respect neighborhoods whenever possible.

In the course of developing this recommendation, some people encouraged us to make the redistricting commission's work final. But we believe the commission's recommendations should be submitted to the City Council for final adoption, so that ultimately, the public can hold their elected officials accountable for redistricting.

1-5. Vote by Mail

Permits mail-only balloting in special elections.

Our current Charter doesn't permit an election to be conducted solely by mail, which means that elections must be run at hundreds of neighborhood polling places, a process that some say is expensive and discourages turnout. This recommendation would allow the Mayor and Council to conduct certain special city elections by mail balloting only.

The growing use of absentee ballots in Los Angeles shows that voters like voting by mail. Some people have expressed concern that vote-by-mail elections might encourage fraud. But the experience of other states, counties and cities that already have vote-by-mail elections shows that they're cost-effective, honest and increase voter turnout. We recommend restricting vote by mail to these special elections, so the city can assess the overall effect of this new voting system before taking bigger steps with it.

1-6. Board of Education

Changes the way that Board of Education districts in the Los Angeles Unified School District are drawn and increases the Board's size and pay for members.

We believe the education of our children is crucial. The current School Board has seven members elected by district. While some people feel that the Board size should not be changed, we recommend increasing the number of seats on the Board from seven to nine. Currently, each Board member represents 607,000 residents. We think that it would be valuable to reduce the size of districts by about 20% by adding two districts.

Currently, each Board member earns $24,000 a year, an amount that has not been changed since 1983. While some people feel that the Board's salary should not be increased, and others feel it should be increased to a full-time salary, we believe that a moderate increase should be implemented.

This recommendation would also establish a commission to advise the City Council on how to redistrict the Board of Education and would, for the first time, formally incorporate public input into the process. We believe this would be an especially important feature for residents who live within LAUSD boundaries but outside L.A. city limits.

objective two: clarify roles in city government

In Los Angeles, many people say the ability of the public to hold their leaders accountable is limited. Council members are very powerful, but their power is exercised in ways that can be difficult for the public to track. The Mayor also has considerable power, but at times faces obstacles in managing city departments. The Mayor's role can be further obscured by the intervening level of city commissions.

These recommendations could make it easier for the public – and city employees – to know who's responsible for what. They could also pave the way for more efficiency in the delivery of services. In developing these proposals, we agreed that the Office of the Mayor should have principal authority to manage city departments, that the City Council and the Mayor should serve as the primary policy-setting bodies, and that oversight functions should be housed mainly in the City Council and other city offices.

What's a city commission?

City commissions make decisions affecting the management, operations and policies of city departments. They are comprised of citizens who are appointed by the Mayor, with City Council approval.

Citizen commissions were a unique feature of the 1925 Charter. They provided an opportunity for citizen involvement and decentralization of authority that was not nearly so widespread in other big cities at the time.

Over the years, however, many have argued that the commission system has blurred responsibility for department decisions.

2-1. Removal of General Managers

Gives the Mayor greater responsibility for managing the city's workforce and the delivery of services.

Currently, the Mayor can't fire the general manager of a city department unless the City Council agrees. Some people say this makes it hard for department heads and the public to know who is in charge. Our recommendation would remove the Charter requirement that the City Council approve the Mayor's removal of general managers of city departments, making the Mayor clearly responsible for managing the city's workforce and the delivery of its services. Some people say this change could give the Mayor too much authority. To avoid the risk of cronyism and political paybacks we recommend keeping the current Charter requirement that gives the City Council approval over the Mayor's appointments of general managers. To further define lines of authority, we recommend that the Mayor alone conduct merit pay reviews for general managers, but within a salary range established by the Council.

2-2. Exempt Positions

Streamlines the process for filling positions that are exempted from Civil Service.

Voters recently approved a measure that exempted 150 high-level city positions from Civil Service requirements. The Charter amendment requires that the City Council approve both the criteria for filling the positions and the people chosen for the jobs. Some people think this two-step process has created backlogs.

We recommend that the City Council approve only the criteria for filling these 150 positions. That way, the general manager would have authority to hire the person who meets the specifications and possibly get that person on the job more quickly.

2-3. Department Management

Clarifies department management by putting certain city departments under appointed citizen commissions while leaving general managers in charge of other departments.

City commissions are groups of citizens who are appointed by the Mayor (with City Council approval) to make decisions affecting the management, operations and policies of city departments. All Charter departments are assigned commissions, but not all commissions actually manage their departments. Some people feel that more departments should be run by commissions. Others say that commissions should be completely abolished. In our view, not all departments are the same, and not all of them should be run in the same way. Some need more oversight from hands-on citizen commissions, while some should look to their appointed experts more for management.

We recommend that the Ethics, Fire, Library, Pensions, Retirement, Police, Public Works, and Recreation and Parks Commissions continue to manage their departments.

We recommend not only keeping but strengthening managing commissions for the city's business-like enterprises – the departments of Airport, Harbor, and Water and Power. The commissions that head these departments should continue to manage their departments and have the authority to appoint, remove, and evaluate the general manager, subject to Council confirmation. We think this system will let the commissions manage the departments efficiently while allowing these departments to react better to changes in market conditions (like deregulation of electric power).

We believe that day-to-day management of the departments of Civil Service and Planning should be left to the general manager so that the commissioners can focus on the important quasi-judicial, advisory, and other special functions they fulfill.

objective two: clarify roles in city government

2-4. Council Veto

Gives the Council the ability to veto the decisions of most appointed citizen commissions.

In 1991, voters approved a Charter amendment commonly known as Prop. 5 that lets the Council adopt or reject a decision made by a city commission. Prop. 5 also allows the Council to take new action that overrides a commission decision. Some feel that Prop. 5 works well as it is; others say it should be eliminated. We recommend changing Prop. 5 so that the Council can still adopt or reject the action of most commissions by a veto, but can't change it. In our view, the Council should provide oversight of commissions rather than acting in place of them and obscuring management authority.

We're also recommending that the Ethics Commission, the city pensions and retirement boards, and the Civil Service Commission's disciplinary decisions be exempted from this Council review entirely.

2-5. Government Reorganization

Gives the Mayor and the Council shared power to reorganize appointed city departments and offices.

The Mayor and the City Council currently share the authority to reorganize city departments. That's a process that works and should be kept. But when it comes to appointed offices such as the City Clerk and the Treasurer, the current Charter doesn't let the Mayor and the Council act. Those offices can only be changed by public vote. We recommend extending the reorganization power of the Mayor and Council so that it applies to appointed offices, as well as departments, to provide greater flexibility in city government.

2-6. Controller and Finance

Reorganizes the financial operations of the city by consolidating functions into a new Department of Finance.

Currently, the city's financial management functions are scattered among a number of appointed and elected offices. We recommend consolidating the city's financial functions, including those performed by the City Clerk and Treasurer, under a new Department of Finance. The Finance Department would be headed by a Director of Finance, appointed and removed by the Mayor, subject to Council approval.

The City Controller is the person responsible for doublechecking payments before they're made, and with auditing those payments afterwards. Under this recommendation, the Controller would continue to hold an elected position responsible for guarding against fraud in city finance.

2-7. City Attorney

The City Attorney should continue to be elected by the people and should be both legal advisor and criminal prosecutor.

The Charter currently specifies that the City Attorney be elected and oversee an office responsible for both civil and criminal cases. Although some people advocate splitting the office in two and having one branch appointed by the Mayor or City Council, we recommend keeping the current framework. Our commission believes an elected City Attorney is better able to give legal advice without worrying about political considerations and to decide difficult issues between the Mayor and Council. Plus, a City Attorney's office with unified civil and criminal functions would, in our view, be less expensive for taxpayers than running two separate offices.

2-8. City Pensions and Retirement

Gives city pensions and retirement boards greater management authority and allows participation by retired members.

If you are a retired city employee, you may not have a say in how your city pension or retirement board is managed – often only city officials and current employees do. We recommend that the Charter require all city pensions and retirement boards to open their membership to retired members. We also recommend giving the pensions and retirement boards the power to appoint, remove, and evaluate their general managers, with Council approval. This change is intended to give greater independence to these boards, which, by state law, are charged with fiduciary duties to their beneficiaries.

objective two: clarify roles in city government

2-9. Planning

Modifies the planning and permit process and combines the work of the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals into one Planning Commission.

Many people in Los Angeles complain that the land-use planning and permitting process is especially confusing because two different agencies, the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Planning Commission, have similar powers. To make planning and permitting faster and easier, we recommend combining these two commissions into just one Planning Commission and increasing the Planning Commission's membership from five to nine.

We also recommend shortening the appeals process for land-use permits. Currently, people seeking land-use permits may need to go through many levels of appeal before they can get a final decision. Some people contend that this process improves decision making; others find it frustrating and costly. We recommend that the Charter allow only one level of appeal.

2-10. City Council Organization

Gives the City Council more flexibility to conduct meetings outside City Hall and to organize its work.

Our current Charter requires the City Council to meet at least three times a week at City Hall and to organize itself into 15 committees each chaired by a different member. We think the City Council could be more effective if it had the power to organize its own committee structure, as long as members aren't excluded from committee participation. We also recommend that the Charter be revised to give the Council more opportunity to hold regular meetings away from downtown and out in the community.

objective three: simplifying the charter

Amended more than 400 times since 1925, the Charter has been transformed over the years from a guiding set of principles into an operations manual. As a result of its patchwork design, many people claim, the Charter is difficult to interpret and accessible only to an inside circle of city attorneys and bureaucrats.

3-1. A Leaner Charter

Makes the Charter leaner, more flexible and easier to read.

We believe the current Charter is too long and detailed, is difficult to read and a challenge to understand. Since the Charter can only be changed by a vote of the people, its detail may make it harder to adjust to the changing conditions and needs of its citizens. Some people say that the Charter's length is not important and that it *should* contain all the rules. We recommend making the Charter simpler.

Some of the ways we would simplify the Charter include:

- collecting all the details regarding pensions, retirement and Civil Service (which make up one-third of the Charter) into a single article or volume
- removing duplicate and overridden provisions
- simplifying rules concerning city powers, like those of the Mayor and Council

We also recommend moving some things from the Charter to city code, which can be changed by an action of the City Council and the Mayor, rather than a vote of the people. For example, much of the detail regarding election procedures and the structure of city departments can be established by ordinance, which can be changed more easily as the needs of the people change.

thank you for your time

Thank you for taking the time to read through this workbook and provide us with some feedback. We will consider your input as we draft final recommendations for City Council review.

If you would like more information or want to know how you can get involved, please attend one of the open houses listed on the back of this workbook. Or, you can contact us toll free at 1-877-LAspeak.

open houses

Speak up on Charter reform at one of these open houses:

Northridge Recreation Center
18300 Lemarsh Street, September 16, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

Christ the Good Shepherd
Episcopal Church - Leimert Park
3303 W. Vernon Avenue, September 26, 1998, 9:00 am - noon

Southwestern University
School of Law - Library Building
675 S. Westmoreland Avenue, October 1, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

Lincoln Heights Senior Center
2323 Workman Street, October 8, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

Mar Vista Recreation Center
11430 Woodbine Avenue, October 13, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

CBS Studio Center - Studio City
4024 Radford Avenue, October 19, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

Peck Park Recreation Center - San Pedro
560 N. Western Avenue, October 28, 1998, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

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